

February 11, 2020

IN RE: LB 1018

Senator Stinner and Members of the Appropriations Committees:

My name is James Michael Bowers. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Lincoln-Lancaster County Board of Health in support of providing a sustainable and adequate stream of funding to local public health departments.

I have been a member of the Board of Health for the past 5 years and currently have the privilege of serving as President of the Board. I want to emphasize the word 'privilege' and tell you in a few words why I have become such a devoted advocate of public health.

I came to our Board with little knowledge of public health but with a desire to become an effective Board member. It didn't take me long to realize that those two small words – public health – have enormous implications for me and for everyone. I was blown away by the scope of public health. Today, if someone says to me that our Health Department doesn't impact them, I ask them if they drink the water, eat in restaurants, have a licensed pet, appreciate smoke free buildings, bring their kids to a child care center, or pay any attention to the tremendous toll that preventable chronic diseases are having on people they know.

Public health touches absolutely everyone, every single day, in many different and important ways. People need to know this, to appreciate this, and to recognize that financial support for public health is imperative.

I have seen firsthand the hard work the dedicated public health professionals accomplish every day to keep our city and county safe and healthy. They are efficient with their resources, passionate about their causes, and effective in their results.

As a Board of Health member, I have the opportunity to voice my approval of policies and ordinances that are critical to the health of our citizens. I provide input on the direction that programs may take, and I learn about the impact that the Department's programs are having on the health of the community.

For example:

- The department is addressing new and emerging diseases continually, most recently coronavirus
- Developing maps for our community to identify the greatest health inequities
- Our community is increasing physical activity



- More at-risk children are receiving dental care regularly
- Home visitation to promote positive pregnancy outcomes and promote early childhood development, and prevent child abuse and neglect
- Resources are being sought to combat the rising incidence of sexually transmitted infections
- Convening our City Overdose Committee to address a rising health issue
- Addressing elevated childhood lead levels
- The goal of diverting 100,000 pounds annually of hazardous waste from the landfill has been reached

Our local public health departments provide the leadership in the community to address current and emerging health threats to our communities. I can't emphasize to you enough the need for strengthening our public health system to continue to address and improve the health of our citizens. There is much more we can do to improve health outcomes and reduce costs.

I hope that I've conveyed my dedication to public health and have convinced you that the need for funding public health is great. I urge you to appropriate funds to each of the local Health Departments in Nebraska.

Sincerely,

James Michael Bowers, President  
Lincoln-Lancaster County Board of Health